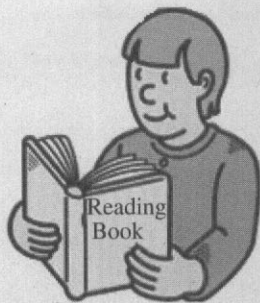


- Tehran.
- Alderson, J. C. (1990a). Testing reading comprehension skills (Part One). *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 6(2), 425-438.
- _____. (1990b). Testing reading comprehension skills (Part Two). *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 7(1), 465-503.
- _____. (2003). *Assessing reading*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Alderson, J. C., & Urquhart, A. H. (1983). *Reading in a foreign language*. Longman.
- Alexander, P.A. & Fox, E. (2004). A historical perspective on reading research and practice. In R.B. Ruddell & N.J. Unrau (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (pp.33-68). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Cheek, E. H., & Collins, M. D. (1985). *Strategies for reading comprehension*. Columbus: Charles Merrill.
- Corrigan, A., Dobson, B., Kellerman, E., Spaan, M., Strowe, L., & Tyma, S. (1979). *Michigan test of English language proficiency (Form Q)*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.
- Cummings, O. W. (1983). *Differential measurement of reading comprehension skills for students with discrepant subskill profiles*. Arthur Anderson Center for Professional Education.
- Field, J. (2003). *Psycholinguistics : A resource book for students*. London: Routledge.
- Field, J. (2004). *Psycholinguistics: The key concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Downing, J. (1982). Reading- skill or skills? *The Reading Teacher*, 35, 34-37.
- Goatly, A. (2000). *Critical reading and writing*. London: Routledge.
- Graney, J. H. (1990). Determination of fact and opinion: A critical reading problem. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 19, 147-165.
- Harrison, C. (1995). Information skills. In S. Brindley (Ed.), *Teaching English* (pp. 105-115). London: Routledge.
- Hermann, D. J., & Rubenfield, L. S. (1985). Lexical representation of fact and opinion. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 14, 81-97.
- Hughes, A. (1989). *Testing for language teachers*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Jenkins, J.R. & Pany, D.(1980). Teaching reading comprehension in the middle grades. In R.J. Spiro, B.C. Bruce, & W.F. Brewer (Eds.), *Theoretical issues in reading comprehension* (pp.555-574). New Jersey : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Johnson, K. (2001). *An introduction to foreign language learning and teaching*. London: Longman.
- Kiparsky, P. and Kiparsky, C. (1970). Fact. In Bierwisch & K.E. Heidolph (Eds.), *Progress in linguistics*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Lewis, J. (2002). *Reading for academic success*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Mirhassani, A., & Khosravi, A. A. (2002). Issues on reading comprehension. *Roshd Quarterly*, 16, 41-53.
- Mirhassani, A. & Rahmani, N. (2003). *Reading skillfully 2*. Tehran: Zabankadeh.
- Munby, J. (1978). *Communicative syllabus design*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Rosenshine, B.V. (1980). Skill hierarchies in reading comprehension. In R.J. Spiro, B.C. Bruce, & W.F. Brewer (Eds.), *Theoretical issues in reading comprehension* (pp.535-554). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Rost, D. H. (1993). Assessing the different components of reading comprehension: Fact or fiction. *Language Testing Journal*, 10(1), 79-92.
- Ushiro, Y.(2004). Reading. In M. Byram (Ed.), *Routledge encyclopedia of language teaching and learning* (pp. 504-506). London: Routledge.
- Wallace, C. (1996). Reading with a suspicious eye: Critical reading in the foreign language classroom. In G. Cook & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *Principle and practice in applied linguistics*. Oxford: OUP.
- Wallace, C. (2001). Reading. In R. Carter & D. Nunan (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages* (pp. 21-27). Cambridge: CUP.



Discussion and conclusion

The ultimate goal of the present study was to know whether there is any relationship between the ability to recognize fact/opinion and overall reading comprehension. On the whole, the results showed a significant correlation between the overall reading comprehension, as measured by a subsection of the MTELP, and the scores obtained on the F/O test ($r=.3587$, $p<001$). The results, however, were modified when we calculated the correlations separately for each group. That is, no significant correlation was observed between the MTELP and F/O scores obtained by the L ($r=.13$, $p<05$) and M groups ($r=.29$, $p<05$). However, the results were significant in the case of the A group ($r=.46$, $p<05$). Overall the results suggest a relationship between the ability to recognize fact/opinion and the overall reading comprehension skill at the more advanced level of proficiency in FL. It is to be noted that the relationship that is explored here seems to increase with the proficiency level. Thus it may be hypothesized that the ability to recognize fact/opinion is not a sub-skill of the general FL reading skill at lower levels of proficiency but may develop, or become a sub-skill, as the level of FL reading proficiency increases.

In sum, we observed a relationship between the ability to recognize fact/opinion and overall reading comprehension in the more advanced group of participants in our study. This suggests that the nature of reading skill may be different at

different levels of proficiency in FL. The findings derived from this study have theoretical as well as pedagogical implications.

With respect to theoretical implications, we can say that in any discussion of evaluation in reading, it is first necessary to define those skills which are essential to reading act. In other words, in order to measure any behavior, it is necessary to know that behavior and what the basic components of that behavior are. As was mentioned at the outset of this paper, there were controversial issues about the nature of reading comprehension and its components. With the above-mentioned discussion in mind, it seemed that there are not sufficient reasons to assume that several clearly distinguishable and (from the point of view of a psychologist or reading specialist) meaningfully interpretable sub-skills (recognition of fact and opinion) of reading comprehension exist among low and intermediate levels.

With regard to pedagogical implications, it must be noted that in order to improve the ability of EFL students to comprehend reading texts presented in English, it is crucial to understand which types of sub-skills should be focused and used for EFL learners at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. Material designers and textbook writers can take the results of this study into account. It seems that textbook writers should provide specific texts including fact/opinion at advanced level. Clearly more research is needed to throw light on the nature of sub-skills at each stage in the development of proficiency in FL.

References

- Alavi, S. M. (2002). On the relationship between Grammar and FCE-TOEFL reading comprehension tests. In *Proceedings of the first conference on issues in English language teaching in Iran*. Tehran: Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of

RC test, we calculated the correlation between the scores obtained by the participants on this test and those received on the MTELP subtest. The correlation was found to be significant ($r=.6471$, $p<.001$), which was an index of the criterion-related validity of the RC test.

Procedure

Three steps were taken in this study. First, the MTELP was administered to the participants. Next, the F/O test was distributed and the participants were required to determine whether the passages included factual information or the author's opinion. The difference between fact and opinion was explained using the following guidelines:

Fact is that which is provable. An opinion is a judgment. Thus, the sentence, '*Her hair is black*' states a fact. The sentence, '*Her hair is beautiful*' states an opinion. (Source: Cheek and Collins, 1985).

During the third step, after participants finished determining whether the paragraphs represented fact or opinion, they were asked to go through the paragraphs again and answer the 20 short-answer comprehension questions (i.e., RC) that were provided. The tests were all administered to participants in one session lasting about one and a half hour.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was carried out using the t-test and the Pearson correlations formula. First, all the obtained raw scores of the two tests (i.e., MTELP and F/O) were standardized using z-scores. Second, the means obtained on MTELP and RC were compared using a t-test. Next, the relationship between MTELP, F/O, and RC scores was computed using the Pearson correlation formula. Correlations were also computed for each proficiency group (i.e., L, M, A) separately.

Results

As indicated earlier in this paper, the RC test was constructed to ensure that the 9 paragraphs were appropriate for the participants in terms of their difficulty level. To determine this, the results obtained by the participants on this test were compared with those received on MTELP using a t-test. The results show ($M_{RC} = 14.17 > M_{MTELP} = 8.82$, $p < .001$), the mean score obtained on RC was significantly higher than that obtained on MTELP, which is an indication that the 9 paragraphs were at the comprehension level of the participants.

Due to the fact that the highest score on MTELP was 20 and it was 9 on F/O, the scores were standardized using z-scores before computing the correlation. The correlation between MTELP and F/O test scores was found to be .3587 which was significant. The result presented in Table 1 indicated that there was a relationship.

Table 1. Correlation between MTELP and F/O scores (z-scores)

Correlation	F/O
MTELP	.3587(92)
	p=.000

As mentioned earlier, the MTELP and F/O correlation was also computed for each proficiency group separately. The results showed a significant correlation for group A ($r=.46$, $p<.05$) but not for groups L ($r=.13$, $p<.05$) and M ($r=.29$, $p<.05$) (see Table2).

Table2. Correlation between MTELP and F/O scores (z-scores) at three levels of proficiency.

Group L	Group M	Group A
$r=.1352(17)$	$r=.2988(57)$	$r=.4677(18)$
$p=.605$	$p=.24$	$p=.05$

put it, lexical units seem to be the classical example for fact/opinion information.

Graney (1990) attributes the capability to determine fact/opinion to 'sophisticated' readers and maintains that "when a somewhat sophisticated reader directs attention towards this task [determination of fact and opinion], he can do it, he can say whether a text is more fact or opinion" (1990, p. 148). In other words, Graney views the ability to determine fact and opinion as one of the sub-skills of reading ability in skilled readers. On the other hand, Harrison (1995) argues it is naive or wrong to say that just because it is important to be able to discriminate between fact and opinion imagine that there are entirely separate sets of "fact discrimination skills", "opinion discrimination skills", each of which needs to be taught separately. Harrison (1995, p. 105) focuses on information skills and says, "Information skills are those which enable one to select, comprehend, and integrate information, usually from a number of sources". In the present study researcher aimed at finding out if there is any relationship between overall reading comprehension skill and the ability to recognize fact and opinion in three levels of proficiency in EFL. The results can enhance our understanding of the cognitive capabilities involved in L2 and FL reading comprehension.

Method

Participants

Participants were 92 (31 male and 61 female) Iranian university students randomly selected from volunteers who were at the time majoring in English at Khorasgan Azad University. Participants' level of proficiency in English was determined by the reading section of Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP, form Q) (Corrigan, et al 1979). The obtained scores were converted to z-scores and the

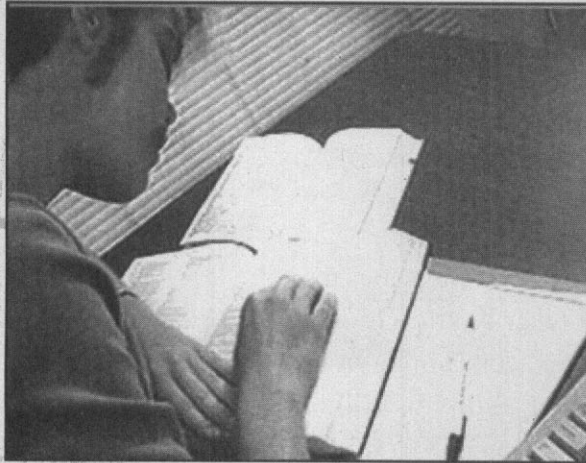
participants were then assigned to three proficiency groups (i.e., two or three standard deviations below the mean, L; one standard deviation below or above the mean, M; two or three standard deviation above the mean, A). There were 17 participants in group L, 57 in group M, and 18 in group A.

Materials

The materials used in this study were Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (herein referred to as 'MTELP') and nine paragraphs of fact and opinion (herein referred to as 'F/O'). The MTELP consisted of five self-contained texts followed by 20 multiple-choice questions. The F/O consisted of nine paragraphs extracted by Graney (1990) from three newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. The paragraphs were from news articles and editorials whose understanding required no technical knowledge (Graney, 1990, p. 155). The texts were typed on a single booklet and each text was followed by three alternatives ('fact', 'unable to decide', 'opinion') to be selected by the participants. To ensure that the 9 paragraphs included dominant factual information or an opinion, three university lecturers in TESOL were asked to read the passages. All three verified that every paragraph was clearly dominated by either fact or opinion.

To measure participants' comprehension of the nine paragraphs, twenty short-answer reading comprehension questions were prepared (herein referred to as 'RC'). A comparison of the score for these questions with the mean score of the MTELP subtest would reveal the level of difficulty of the paragraphs for the participants. To estimate the reliability of the RC test, the KR-21 formula was applied and the obtained reliability of the total test (n=92) was found to be $r=.71$.

To measure the criterion-related validity of the



refers to recognizing and interpreting the linguistic features of the text (e.g., referents, word meanings, discourse indicators). Hughes maintains that micro skills should be taught not as an end in themselves but as a means of improving macro skills.

In this context, Cummings (1983: 1) adopts a middle-ground position and maintains that "early reading consists of interrelated sub-skills, but skilled reading is holistic". According to this position, sub-skills of reading comprehension are induced and developed separately in children and later, by constant practice, they are fused into an integrated and holistic skill. Naturally, the proponents of this position propose the testing of different sub-skills of reading comprehension during the first years of reading instruction.

Critical reading and recognition of fact and opinion

Critical reading demands that readers evaluate the text they are reading (Goatly, 2000; Graney, 1990; Lewis, 2002; Wallace, 2001). This usually involves mapping what is represented in the text against our own experience and knowledge (Wallace, 1996). Critical reading also involves an attempt to understand the purpose or the motivation behind the creation of a text. This is because the writer's purpose directly affects the

way the text is constructed. In this context, Graney (1990, p. 148) views the ability to determine whether a text is fact or opinion as one of the elements that contributes to a reader's evaluation task. He maintains that in deciding whether a text is fact or opinion a reader relies on both linguistic knowledge and background knowledge, which aids the reader in putting the text into a perspective.

The question for Graney (1990) was what aspects of a text readers use in making the determination. The results of his experiment showed that context, established through headlines, had a significant effect on determining fact and opinion. He further that readers use specific types of words to make fact/opinion determinations. These mainly included adjectives, factual/counterfactual verbs, implicative verbs and modals. Kirparsky and Kirparky (1970) viewed factivity/non-factivity a product of the presupposition of many predicates. A predicate such as *tragic*, for example, presupposes that the accompanied information is factual. Hermann and Rubenfield (1985) observed that participants in their study associated fact and opinion with certain lexical items. For example, words such as *officer* and *clerk* were associated with factual information while words such as *punk* and *hippie* were associated with opinion. Overall, as Graney (1990)

و درک مطلب بستگی به سطح زبانی زبان خارجی دارد و در سطح پائین تر زبانی نمی توان مهارت تشخیص واقعیت از عقیده را از خرده مهارت های مهارت خواندن دانست. این بدان معناست که متخصصین باید در امر تهیه و تدوین مطالب درسی و همچنین ارائه راهکارهای تدریس مهارت خواندن، تقویت مهارت تشخیص واقعیت از عقیده را در نظر داشته باشند.

کلیدواژه ها: مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب، عقیده، واقعیت، فراگیران زبان خارجی، مهارت زبانی، خرده مهارت ها.

Abstract

The aim of this inquiry was to find out whether there is any relationship between the ability to recognize fact and opinion, and overall reading comprehension skill in Foreign Language (FL). This question was explored across three proficiency levels. Ninety-two (31 male and 61 female) Iranian senior university students participated in the study. The overall reading ability was measured by the reading subsection of a version of MTELP. Participants were provided with nine paragraphs selected from English newspapers and were asked to recognize whether each paragraph dominantly presented factual information or an opinion. The correct responses received a score of 1 and the incorrect ones received 0. Overall, the results showed a significant correlation between the ability to recognize fact and opinion, and general reading comprehension skill. However, when computed separately, only the results with the higher proficiency group showed a significant correlation. Thus, it may be hypothesized that the ability to recognize fact/opinion is not a sub-skill of general reading skill at lower levels of proficiency in FL but tends to develop, or becomes a sub-skill, as the FL proficiency increases.

Key Words: *comprehension, reading skill, opinion, fact, proficiency sub-skills, FL*

Introduction

Despite the fact that psychologists and educators have been conducting research on various aspects of reading skill for more than a century (e.g., Alderson, 1990a, b, 2003; Alderson & Urquhart, 1983; Alexander & Fox, 2004; Field, 2003, 2004; Johnson, 2001; Ushiro, 2004), there are still controversies surrounding the exact nature of skill, or skills, that are involved in reading comprehension, either in L1 or L2. The analysis of the studies that have been conducted appears to be complicated by the fact that usually many different dimensions are found and similar dimensions are often named differently, as well as different dimensions being named alike. In general, however, studies that have addressed the nature of reading skill(s) seem to have subscribed to one of the two views: a) reading skill is a unitary,

holistic, and indivisible skill which cannot be split into different sub-skills (e.g., Alavi, 2002; Alderson, 1990 a, b; Jenkins & Pany, 1980; Rosenshine, 1980; Rost, 1993), and b) reading skill consists of various sub-skills (e.g., Lewis, 2002; Mirhassani & Khosravi, 2002; Mirhassani & Rahmani, 2003; Munby, 1978).

According to Downing (1982), skilled readers often use particular sub-skills of their reading skill simultaneously over the years and these sub-skills, originally distinct, become fused and no longer activated separately. Hughes (1989) refers to "macro skills" and "micro skills" of reading comprehension. The distinction between these two levels of sub-skills is not made explicit, but it appears that the term "macro skills" refers to understanding the general ideas in the text (e.g., information, gist, argument) while "micro skills"



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OVERALL READING COMPREHENSION AND RECOGNITION OF FACT/OPINION IN FL

چکیده

خواندن و درک مطلب یکی از موارد اساسی و مهم، پیشرفت تحصیلی به شمار می آید. در سال های اخیر مطالعاتی که بر روی یادگیری زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی انجام شده، معطوف به درک محتوای که در نهایت بر فراگیری زبان تأثیر می گذارد. بعضی از محققان، تهیه کنندگان مطالب درسی و معلمان بر این باورند که خواندن و درک مطلب از خرده مهارت های دیگری (مانند خواندن اجمالی، خواندن سطحی، تشخیص واقعیت از عقیده و...) نیز تشکیل شده است. از طرف دیگر، بسیاری از صاحب نظران معتقدند که خواندن و درک مطلب نیابستی به خرده مهارت های دیگری تقسیم شود بلکه باید در حالت کلی در نظر گرفته شود. این تحقیق تلاشی است در جهت روشن نمودن این که تفکیک واقعیت از عقیده جز خرده مهارت های خواندن و درک مطلب جامع زبان انگلیسی است یا خیر. به عبارت دیگر آیا رابطه ای بین توانایی تشخیص واقعیت از عقیده با مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب جامع در زبان انگلیسی وجود دارد یا خیر؟ این سؤال در سه سطح مهارت زبانی مورد بررسی قرار گرفت. ۹۲ نفر از دانشجویان (۳۱ نفر پسر و ۶۱ نفر دختر) رشته ترجمه زبان انگلیسی مقطع کارشناسی دانشگاه در این آزمایش شرکت نمودند. توانایی خواندن جامع آزمودنی ها به وسیله بخش خواندن و درک مطلب آزمون مهارت زبان انگلیسی میسینگان مورد اندازه گیری قرار گرفت. آزمودنی های این تحقیق براساس نمراتی که در آزمون مهارت میسینگان کسب کرده بودند به سه سطح زبانی تقسیم شدند. از شرکت کنندگان خواسته شد تا در نه متن کوتاه که از روزنامه های انگلیسی انتخاب شده بود واقعیت را از عقیده تشخیص دهند. برای پاسخ های صحیح نمره یک و برای پاسخ های غلط نمره صفر در نظر گرفته شد. به طور کلی نتایج نشانگر معنی دار بودن میزان همبستگی بین توانایی تشخیص واقعیت از عقیده و مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب جامع است. بنابراین می توان این چنین فرض نمود که ماهیت خواندن